Jewish Responses to the Holocaust

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Introduction

Recently, a lot of articles, films and documents have been written, made and presented on the Holocaust, or the Shoah, where six million Jewish people were massacred by Nazis. (Now some people object to the use of the word "Holocaust," for it originally means a "ritual of 'whole [burnt-] offering'"[1] and the six million were not killed in the offering to God in that sense.) Most of those articles are by much better writers than me or by first-hand witnesses of the Shore. Yet I have decided to write this paper, because while reading on the Shoah, I was struck by two facts and a question and felt I must clarify the meaning of the Shoah at least a little to myself. The first fact that has struck me is the uniqueness of the Shoah: It was not only a most terrible genocide in the physical sense, but what the Nazis tried to destroy was the whole humanity of the Jewish people. The second fact is, then, that despite the intensity of sufferings, there seems to be much less anger and hatred than I expected which is manifestly expressed by the survivors against the Germans. Such representative surviving authors as Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi express little hostile anger against the German people who directly persecuted them. Of course, there has been much anger on the part of the victims against the Nazis, and when we read, for example, *Children of the Holocaust*, we find that feeling to be so strong in many survivors that it has been transmitted to their children and still affecting that new generation today.[2] Therefore, it must be largely, or at least partly, because of their Jewish faith that those authors who belong to the class of the intelligentzia refrain from expressing such anger and hatred. Wiesel writes,

> The Jewish people never answered hate with hate; yes, they sometimes had to take radical measures to protect themselves, but the enemy never succeeded in bringing his Jewish victims down to his level.[...]
> It is easy to hate war when one is defeated, but Jews have hated war even when they won. We never seem to hate the enemy, it is war we hate, it is war we consider the enemy.[3]

It seems to me that they often turn to ask God why they should have suffered so much rather than to turn to the persecuting people for vengeance. Especially, some people seem to regard their sufferings as to be for the good of the whole world, including the persecuting European nations. From this, the question that has occurred to me is how the Jewish people see the Shoah and why, especially in relation to their God. How can they think of themselves as saviours of their oppressors, for example? The existence of such tremendous sufferings of a people is not only a great problem for themselves but for us, too, especially if we believe in God who is good, benevolent and all-powerful, or if we believe that the world is not absurd after all but has meaning and is worth while

living in with hope. It is significant for us to listen to the voice of the suffers themselves especially because they are the believers of the same God of Abraham that we Christians believe in.

At first I was going to discuss the effect of the Shoah on the mind of the victims, as well as to consider their interpretations of the meaning of their sufferings. For, that would be meaningful for us living today because the Nazis performed dehumanization of the Jews in the concentration camps by systematically depriving them of the essential necessities of human identity and dignity, so that from the way the Nazis treated the victims, we conversely learn what is essential to be a human being. Yet, now I dare not presume to "discuss the effect of the Shoah on the mind of the suffers." For, while studying, I have soon realized that their inner wounds have been much too deep and too painful to be easily observed from outside. Making them clear is far beyond my power. Therefore, now I will concentrate on their expressed view on their own sufferings, especially on the metaphysical and philosophical dimension. It should be remembered, then, that the real sufferings and painful feelings are not necessarily answered by the in a sense too neat contemplation in the following sections. Yet, before going on to that theological thinking, it is still necessary, at least a little, to present what the Shoah was like to them, because, curiously at first sight, not many testimonies or protests against such anti-Semitism were written by the Jewish people themselves for some times after the War and I expect what I have read recently are not still familiar to many of the Japanese readers.

Testimonies

As to the scarcity of survivors' immediate witness-documents on the Shoah, Dr. Domb at Cambridge University who teaches Israeli literature gives us largely two reasons, which themselves are the testimonies of the seriousness of the effect of the Shoah: First, there is limit of describing such a horrific event. The terror of the Shoah was such that it simply could not expressed by human imagination. Besides, there was a gap between aesthetic and ethical dimension—there was some shy recognition, or feeling that writing about the Shoah, especially in literary form, was almost immoral. Secondly, most of the literate people who would have been capable of recording the first hand experience were killed and it took some time for the next generation to grow and acquire the enough literary ability to do that. Two-third of the Jews in Europe were killed, and a survivor, Jack Diamond, tells us, "The intellectuals were the first to die....They thought about it all."[4] As to the limit of expression, Primo Levi also writes, "the history of the Lagers has been written almost exclusively by those who, like myself, never fathomed them to the bottom. Those who did so did not return, or their capacity for observation was paralyzed by suffering and incomprehension."[5] As Helen Epstein tells us, many of the survivors are suffering from lasting apathy or anxiety, depression, amnesia, etc., from the shock in the getto, and in many cases, they are hardly capable of expressing their horrible experiences.[6]

Having lost almost all the loved ones and themselves gone through the suffering beyond expression, it is reported that many of them have even lost the ability of alleviating their mental pain by such an elemental physical reactions as mourning and crying. One of the survivors, who had lost all the other members of his family in the Shoah, admits he does not mourn for them. "It's too many

to mourn. The only time I mourn is when I go say Yizkhor [the prayer for the dead recited only on certain holidays]. There's just too many to mourn. You mourn when things happen normally. I don't even have a grave to go to to mourn. [After the war, I didn't weep either.]"(blankets in the original)[7] Aaron Hass, observing this mentality of the survivors, suggests, "When we mourn, we excrete the pain, the sadness, the anger, the guilt. And after our body and mind have been expunged, we can reenter the world afresh, with hope. Survivors, however, have not mourned. They remain locked in their own sphere. Consequently, their bitterness continues to sear their soul."[8] This incapacity of mourning is surely from too much graveness of their grief and psychological wound. Once they allow themselves to mourn, perhaps they would break down.

As to their anger and vengeance against the Nazi Germans, as the fact that many survivors still have nightmares suggests, their fear was so strong that it has been preventing their anger from externalizing. Human beings are incapable of getting aggressively angry when they are feeling frightened or intimidated by those against whom they are supposed to throw their anger. A survivor even after fifty years after the Shoah still expresses her feeling thus: "I've never felt anger at Germans...perhaps because I'm still afraid of them. I've felt anxiety, and I've felt hurt, but not anger. When I get depressed I feel they have won. My revenge is when I go on and survive."[9] Besides, as Hass remarks, "Survivors must reassure themselves that their enemies did not succeed. To admit irreparable damage, to admit that their tormentors' reach has extended to their new life, would imply that, ultimately, they had lost."[10] Many a strong minded Jew has been trying to be positive, turning to the future, not the past, or at least, they are trying to look so. "At times," Hass also writes, "'I'll show you how normal I am' was the underlying motivation.[...] because there is no place for people who are crying all the time.[...] And just as there was no place in Europe for the Jew, Elisa Korn (and her fourteen-year-old daughter who was murdered), there is no place in America for the real Elisa Korn, the Elisa Korn who must confine her tears to the inside."[11] Thus, they do not show their grief overtly—though in fact, "The survivor's belief that he must present a polite, good-humored facade exacerbates the sense of estrangement which he feels from the rest of the "normal" world. Having already been treated as less than human and betrayed by humanity, he is, once again, forbidden from acting in a human fashion, from showing how he really feels."[12] Primo Levi once said in reply to the question on his writings: "In these books there are no expressions of hate for the Germans, no desire for revenge. Have you forgiven them?"

> My personal temperament is not inclined to hatred. I regard it as bestial, crude, and prefer on the contrary that my actions and thoughts, as far as possible, should be the product of reason; therefore I have never cultivated within myself hatred as a desire for revenge, or as a desire to inflict suffering on my real or presumed enemy, or as a private vendeta. Even less do I accept hatred as directed collectively at an ethnic group, for example, all the Germans; if I accepted it, I would feel that I was following the precepts of Nazism, which was founded precisely on national and racial hatred.[...][13]

Yet, this Levi, too, failed to be free from the effect of the Shoah after all. He committed suicide in 1987, after forty-two years from Auschwitz, though during those years he had been impressing the others with his positive personality. He even said, "A friend of mine, who was deported to the

women's Camp of Ravensbrück, says that the camp was her university. I think I can say the same thing, that is, by living and then writing about and pondering those events, I have learned many things about man and about the world;" while admitting "that this positive outcome was a kind of good fortune granted to very few."[14] The suicide of Levi shows how it is still difficult for the suffers of Auschwitz to overcome their spiritual wounds.

Thus, the scarcities of psychological testimonies or of angry cry does not at all mean the lack of things that demand consideration. Nor does it mean that Jewish survivors reject such Western civilization as has condoned the Nazi Germany committing that atrocities and that they therefore do not want any spiritual commitment with us, not expecting we could understand their sufferings. On the contrary, those who can write, write down their wish to be remembered. As Elie Wiesel urges us—

> Let us say Kaddish not only for the dead, but also for the living who have forgotten the dead.
> And let the prayer be more than a prayer, more than lament; let it be outcry, protest and defiance.
> And above all let it be an act of remembrance. For that is what the victims wanted; to be remembered, at least to be remembered.
> For just as the killer was determined to erase Jewish memory, so were the dying heroes and fighting martyrs bent on maintaining it alive.
> They are now being defamed; or forgotten–which is like killing them a second time.
> Let us say Kaddish together–and not allow others to betray them posthumously.[15]

Also many other survivors, it is reported, see it as their responsibility to tell the world what the Shoah was all like. A man who left his parents and five younger brothers behind in the Warsaw ghetto has told to Hass, "At least one person from the family is alive to tell the story. If we all would be killed, there would be no one to tell."[16]

Destruction of Humanity

In *If This is a Man,* Primo Levi writes of a German officer checking the number of the Jews in a train for Auschwiz.

> At the end the officer asked "*Wieviel Stück?*" The corporal saluted smartly and replied that there were six hundred and fifty 'pieces' and that all was in order.[17]

This symbolically signifies the way the Nazis determined to treat Jews not as human beings but as objects or things ("pieces") to use up and destroy. Levi describes Auschwitz as a place of "the demolition of a man."[18] As is well known now, Jews were deprived of all their belongings on arrival there. Even their names were taken away and they were reduced to be numbers that were tattooed on their left arms.

> Imagine now a man who is deprived of everyone he loves, and at the same time of his house, his habits, his clothes, in short, of everything he possesses: he will be a hollow man, reduced to suffering and needs, forgetful of dignity and restraint, for he who loses all often easily loses himself. He will be a man whose life or death can be lightly decided with no sense of human

> affinity, in the most fortunate of cases, on the basis of a pure judgment of utility. It is in this way that one can understand the double sense of the term 'extermination camp', and it is now clear what we seek to express with the phrase: 'to lie on the bottom'.[19]

Ami Neiberger writes, "Auschwiz assaulted individuality by stripping incoming prisoners of identity signifiers, such as their names, clothing, hair and personal appearance. Combined with the loss of personal space, conditions which made even the most basic human function torturous, a rigorous routine, and severe overcrowding, of persecuted humanity. Starvation, hard labor and disease reduced bodies to emaciate *Musselmännere* [the camp name for the most apathetic prisoners], awaiting imminent death."[20]

Terrence Des Pres writes of what he calls "Excremental Assault," that had a most debasing effect on the human dignity of the Jews. It was, for instance, preventing the victims to reach the toilet or providing virtually no toilet facilities during the night so that they were forced to use their soup bowls from which they eat at meals though they had never enough water to clean them. He remembers also the almost groundless violence of Kapos against decent Jews: "The pathological rage of such men, their uncontrollable fury when rules were broken, is evidence of a boundless desire to annihilate, to destroy, to smash everything not mobilized within the movement of their own authority. And inevitably, the mere act of killing is not enough; for if a man dies without surrender, if something within him remains unbroken to the end, then the power which destroyed him has not, after all, crushed everything. Something has escaped its reach, and it is precisely this something—let us call it "dignity"—that must die if those in power are to reach the orgasmic peak of their potential domination."[21] The poisonous gas in the gas chamber was insecticide, and it was to the purpose just because insecticide is for killing something much less than human, as well as because it was almost the most economical in terms of both time and money.

In such condition, many people died. Yet it was those who kept their human dignity that survived the selection till the last. The Nazis well knew that the massacre would psychologically affect the young Germans who were in charge of the actual killing if the victims were visibly human. Yet, as it would be easier to kill a dog than to kill a man, and to kill an insect than to kill a dog, if the victims looked apparently less than human, it would be easier for the executioners. This is another reason why they tried to debase the victims to the level of mere animals before killing them.

> And here is a final, vastly significant reason why in the camps the prisoners were so degraded. This made it easier for the SS to do their job. It made mass murder less terrible to the murderers, because the victims appeared less than human. They *looked* inferior.[22]

Thus, the effort of remaining human was vital there. Terrence Des Pres comments on this that "Life itself depends on keeping dignity intact, and this, in turn, depends on the daily, never finished battle to remain visibly human."[23] Primo Levi remembers a colleague who taught him the importance of washing himself everyday.

"So we must certainly wash our faces without soap in dirty water and dry ourselves on our jackets. We must polish our shoes, not because the regulation states it, but for dignity and propriety. We

must walk erect, without dragging our feet, not in homage to Prussian discipline but to remain alive, not to begin to die."[24]

Thus, what was at stake in Auschwiz was not only the physical life of the victims but also, and most of all, their humanity.

Thus, I think we are now ready to turn to see how they, as a people that believes in the Jewish God, see the Shoah after experiencing so much disaster.

Jewish Interpretations of the Meaning of their Sufferings

Traditional Response in Terms of the Law

The most characteristic expression of traditional Judaism is the halakha or the law. God granted them the Torah with a lot of commandments so that they might learn to live according to His will. Yet, as Rabbi Norman Solomon points out, according to Maimonides, if a Jew is forced to transgress any commandment under pain of death, he should generally transgress rather than be killed, "for it is written of the commandments that a man shall do and live by them' (Leviticus 18:5). "Yet if it comes to the commandment that forbid idolatry, adultery/incest and the shedding of blood,[...] should he (the Jew) be ordered to commit them or face death he should die rather than transgress."[25] For instance, when an evil ruler deliberately decrees the abolition of the Torah, Jews should die lest he should commit idolatry. Or if the idolaters told a group of Jews to hand over one of them to be defiled or to be killed, they must not hand over any even if they should all die for that. Rabbi Solomon says, "Sadly, the halakha [...] was the everyday law of the Shoah. Sadly, confessing Christians acted the part of the 'idolaters' of whom that law speaks."[26]

Problem of Pain and Evil

Yet, many of those Jews themselves, although believing in God, cannot still help questioning the properness of the law in face of their sufferings. For instance, they asked "was it proper to recite the customary blessing in the morning prayers thanking God 'who has not made me slave'?"[27]—Then, their solution to the dilemma between the observance of the prayer and the actual fact is to hold that the thanksgiving is to be offered for their spiritual freedom rather than for the physical liberty.

However, the problem of suffering as a whole has not been so easily solved. If God is just and benevolent, He would make the world such that people should not suffer more than they deserve.

Traditional Theological Response

One of the understandable response of the Jewish people, who believe in the justice and right-eousness of Yahweh, has been to regard their sufferings as His punishment.

Yet, certainly, it is misleading and dangerous to explain the Shoah as God's punishment for their sin. Because, first of all, it implicitly attributes to all the victims such sinfulness as to deserve the horrible destruction in Auschwitz, though, obviously, there were too, too many people whose death could not be explained in terms of God's just punishment. Young children and most pious saintly believers were among the killed. In order to explain the death of such innocent victims, one may think of their inherited sin or sin in the previous life (if one believed in reincarnation), yet to do so

would be the same monstrous mistake as to regard any physical handicap or other misfortunes as a result of sin in the previous life or in the past. As we did not suffer the Shoah ourselves, we must never say that their sufferings were result of their sin.

Secondly, the idea of God's punishment leads to the view that Hitler was God's minister to persecute the Jews. Richard Rubenstein, himself a Jew, remembers the words of a Rabbi Probst Grüber, who held this retributive view:

> When Dean Grüber put down his Bible, it seemed as if, once having started, he could not stop himself. He looked at recent events from a thoroughly biblical perspective. In the past, the Jews had been smitten by Nebuchadnezzar and other "rods of God's anger." Hitler was simply another such rod. The incongruity of Hitler and Auschwitz as instruments of a righteous God never seemed to occur to him. Of course, he granted that what Hitler had done was immoral, and he insisted that Hitler's followers were now being punished by God.[28]

Rubenstein admits,

> As long as we continue to hold to the doctrine of the election of Israel, we will leave ourselves open to the theology expressed not only by Dean Grüber but also by some of this century's leading Orthodox Jewish thinkers: because the Jews are God's Chosen People yet failed to keep God's Law, God sent Hitler to punish them.[29]

Yet, still, this interpretation is tremendous both for the Jews themselves and for Christians: if the Shoah was the punishment for Israel's sins, that punishment was unproportionally too heavy.

God's Providence?—Idea of the "Suffering Servant"

If the Shoah was not punishment for the sins of the people of Israel, and yet still God's will, it can be regarded as a part of God's plan to bear a greater good. This interpretation cannot stand about the individual victims because (at least in this world) their lives ended in the gas chamber. Rubenstein again remembers Grüber who said, "When God desires my death, I give it to him! [...] 'Your will be done even if You ask my death.' For some reason, it was part of God's plan that the Jews died. God demands our death daily. He is the Lord, He is the Master; all is in His keeping and ordering."[30] Yet, Rubenstein also reports the opposing view:

> Countess Dr. von Rittberg, the representative of the Evangelical Church to the Bonn government [...] offered the customary interpretation that Israel's destiny is guided by a special Divine concern, but she partially withdrew it in the face of my objection.
>
> "Theologically this may be true, but humanly speaking and in any terms that I can understand, I cannot believe that God wanted the Nazis to destroy the Jews," she said. Her reluctance to follow the logic of her theology to its hideous conclusion, which make the Nazis the accomplices of a righteous God, was understandable.[31]

In order to answer the objection that if the Shoah was in any way God's will, it involved too much sufferings, one might suggest the possibility of compensation in the life after death. Dr. Solomon points out that "the belief in life after death [...], whether expressed as bodily resurrection, eternal life of the spirit, or some combination, remains central in orthodox teaching. Some of the orthodox,

under influence of Kabbala, have adopted in addition the concept of the transmigration of souls.[...] The transmigration of souls easily explains the suffering of innocent children–either they they [sic] are being punished now for sins committed in a previous incarnation, or else they will get compensation for their present sufferings in a later one.[32] However, existence of the life after death is not universally accepted belief in Judaism[33], and therefore, this solution is not decisive nor ideal, for, as mentioned before, it involves the danger of accusing the innocent for the sins in the in fact non-existent previous life.

Thus, when we think of the genocide as God's will, it would be rather natural altogether to give up the belief that God is righteous. Elie Wiesel writes of Primo Levi,

> For Primo Levi, the problem of faith after Auschwitz was posed in stark terms: Either God is God, and therefore all-powerful and hence guilty of letting the murderers do as they pleased, or His power is limited, in which case he is not God. In other words, if God is God, then He is present everywhere. But if He refuses to show Himself, he becomes immoral and inhuman, the enemy's ally or accomplice.[34]

Yet some people, when they think of the death of victims collectively, as a people, interpret the Shoah as part of God's redemptive process, leading ultimately to Israel's restoration. Rubenstein tells us that "contemporary Orthodox Jews in Israel affiliated with Gush Emunim (the Bloc of the Faithful) consider the Holocaust to be an indispensable event in God's redemptive plan for human history."

> For almost two thousand years traditional Judaism sought to restrain the messianic impulse within the Jewish people. In the aftermath of the Holocaust and the wars of the State of Israel, a highly influential segment of contemporary Orthodoxy has become overtly messianic. [...]
>
> Even if God is seen as the ultimate Author of the death camps, it does not follow that His actions at Auschwitz were necessarily punitive. Both Judaism and Christianity allow for the possibility that the innocent may be called upon to suffer sacrificially for the guilty. Neither the Hebrew Bible nor the Christian Scriptures interpret *every* misfortune as divine punishment. For example, in the Book of Job the protagonist is depicted as having experienced the worst misfortunes without having offended God. Similarly, the "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah 53 appears to have been an innocent victim. As we shall see, an important theological interpretation of the Holocaust depicts the victims as sacrificial offerings. As we have noted, the Holocaust has also been interpreted as the "birth pangs of the Messiah."
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> Nevertheless, until the 1967 war, whenever Israel experienced radical communal misfortune, her traditional religious teachers almost always interpreted the event as divine punishment. Of all the misfortunes experienced by the Jewish people, only three can be reckoned as major communal disasters that irrevocably altered the character of the Jewish world: Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of Judea in 586 B.C.E., the Fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in 70 C.E., and the Shoah. Not since 70 C.E. had world Jewry experienced a catastrophe remotely like what was endured between 1939 and 1945. In reality, never before in history had Jews experienced so overwhelming a disaster.[35]

From this recognition of the Shoah being the crisis in the history, Rubenstein even present the

possibility that the Jewish people suffered for us all the people in the world. [That means even for you and me who is writing and reading now this paper!]

> After my encounter with Dean Grüber, I became convinced that Jews were confronted by an inescapable either/or: *One can either affirm the innocence of Israel or the justice of God at Auschwitz.*
>
> Today, I understand that there can be other alternatives. We can, for example, say with Maybaum that the Holocaust victims died a sacrificial death for the sake of the coming of the messianic era *precisely because they were innocent.* We can affirm with Jewish messianists that the Holocaust was an indispensable aspect of the "birthpangs of the Messiah"; we can also affirm with American premillennial dispensationalists that the Holocaust was part of the divine timetable leading up to Christ's second Coming, the Rapture, Armageddon, and the Millennium. Nevertheless, Jewish messianists must face the fact that millions of innocent victims died horribly for the sake of the Lord's plan. [the second italics mine][36]

Yet even when it does not come so much as to the idea of sufferings for the good of all the nations, some at least have come to regard their sufferings for all the Jews.

> Rob Elchonon [...] addressed all Jews:
> "It seems that in Heaven we are regarded as tzadikkim [i.e. righteous], for we are being asked to atone with our bodies for the sins of Israel. Now we really must do teshuva(repent) [...] we must have in mind that we will be better sacrifices if we do teshuva, and we may (?save?) our American brothers and sisters.[...]
> We are about to fulfill the greatest mitzva of all—'with fire You destroyed it, with fire You will rebuild it'—the fire which destroys our bodies is the selfsame fire which will restore the Jewish people."[37]

Irving Greenberg divides the history of Judaism into three parts. The first is from Moses to the Destruction of the Second Temple. The second era was from that period to the Shoah, which was characterized by the hiddenness of God but at the same time by the faith in the covenant. "The Shoah shattered the naive faith in the covenant of redemption, inaugurating a third era the shape of which is determined by our response to the crisis of faith. Greenberg insists that this response must involve all Jews, not merely those who share his orthodox commitment. Auschwitz was 'a call to humans to stop the Holocaust, a call to the people Israel to rise to a new, unprecedented level of covenantal responsibility...The world did not heed that call and stop the Holocaust.[...]Even as God was in Treblinka, so God went up with Israel to Jerusalem.' Thus Jews today, in Israel and elsewhere, have a special responsibility, in fidelity to those who perished, to work for the abolition of that matrix of values that supported genocide."[38]

God's Love for the Israel

Those who regard the Shoah as God's punishment do not necessarily regard themselves especially sinful nor doubt God's justice. To the unavoidable question of iniquities and injustice in the distribution of sufferings, or punishments—Have the other nations, especially Nazi Germans in the case of the Shoah, not sinned more?—the traditional answer is to be found in Amos (3:2) "For you alone have I cared among all the nations of the world; therefore will I punish you for all your iniquities." It

is because they are chosen people, and because God especially cares for them that He should punish them when they are astray. It is just as any parents would punish their own child when he or she has done something wrong though they would not bother at all when other people's child do the same thing. Their sufferings have been then a mark to show how they are in a strong personal relationship with God who is just.

Incidentally, surely because Jewish people see God's relation to them thus as something very "personal" in the sense that God exists and works on them as an irresistible, absolute personal God, sometimes they keep their faith in God even when they suffered so much that they feel almost indignant and on the point of suspecting God's injustice. Elie Wiesel writes,

> The Rebbe had read some of my works in French and asked me to explain why I was angry at God. "Because I loved Him too much," I replied. "And now?" he asked. "Now too. And because I love Him, I am angry at Him." The Rebbe disagreed: "To love God is to accept that you do not understand Him." I asked whether one could love God without having faith. He told me faith had to precede all the rest. "Rebbe," I asked, "how can you believe in God after Auschwitz?" He looked at me in silence for a long moment, his hands resting on the table. Then he replied, in a soft, barely audible voice, "How can you not believe in God after Auschwitz?" Whom else could one believe in? Hadn't man abdicated his privileges and duties? Didn't Auschwitz represent the defeat of humanity? Apart from God, what was there in a world darkened by Auschwitz? The Rebbe stared at me, awaiting my response. I hesitated before answering, "Rebbe, if what you say is meant as an answer to my question, I reject it. But if it is a question—one more question—I accept it." I tried to smile, but failed.[39]

Thus, faith in God and love for Him is closely connected in Jewish people, as is the case in Christians. Yet, in Christianity, existence of sufferings in the world has been perhaps the greatest stumbling rock for many people in their faith in God. However, in Judaism, people do not seem to doubt the existence or the absoluteness of God just because there are a lot of sufferings in the world. Neither do they seem to hesitate to admit their duty to obey God even when they hate Him because of their sufferings. To the eyes of Christians who are familiar to the New Testament passage, "thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment" (Mark, 12:29), the commandment to love God are so important that it seems if one hate God, one could not be believing in God. Yet in Judaism, hatred for God and faith in God seem to be compatible, just as in very close human relations, love, hate and faith in the other person are quite compatible. Wiesel expresses this as this:

> What is Jewish history if not an endless quarrel with God? Pascal phrased it differently. "The history of the Jewish people," he said, "is but a long love affair with God." And as in every love affair, there are quarrels and reconciliations, more quarrels and more reconciliations. And yet neither God nor the Jews ever gave up on the other.[40]

The "Hidden God"

Of the Shoah, there also is the interpretation that it was because God was hidden, or dead, that such a disaster occurred. Martin Buber, who in *I and Thou* stressed the importance of personal relation between man and God, is reported to have asked after the Shoah, "How is a life with God

still possible in a time in which there is an Auschwitz? The estrangement has become too cruel, the hiddenness too deep?"[41] The above question of Primo Levi as to the omnipotence of God, may also be a question about the hiddenness of God. In the Christendom, too, after the World War II, there are those who feel God no longer exists. Thomas Altizer and William Hamilton in their *Radical Theology and the Death of God* expressed the feeling of estrangement from God thus:

> That there once was a God to whom adoration, praise and trust were appropriate, and even necessary, but that now there is no such God. This is the position of the death of God or radical theology. [...]
> The death of God radical theologians, recently given far more visibility than they either desired or deserved, are men without God who do not anticipate his return. But it is not a simple not-having, for there is an experience of loss. Painful for some, not so for others, it is loss none the less. The loss is not of the idols, or of the God of theism, but of the God of the Christian tradition.[42]

Rubenstein also is keenly conscious of God's absence or failure to intervene in the Shoah. What is remarkable in his attitude is again his obstinacy in holding on to Judaism in spite of the failure on God's part. He does no more deny the existence of God than Job in his distress or Jesus on the cross when he cried "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark, 16:34):

> In the face of overwhelming Jewish suffering during the war between Rome and Judea of 131-35 C.E., [Elisha ben Abuyah] exclaimed "*Leth din v'leth dyan*"- "There is neither judgment nor Judge." Anticipating Camus by almost two thousand years, he elected a world without meaning rather than accept the justice of human suffering.
> We concur in this vision of an absurd and ultimately tragic cosmos. We do so because we share with Camus a greater feeling for human solidarity than the Prophetic-Deuteronomic view of God and history can possibly allow. We part company only with Camus's atheism. *It is precisely because human existence is tragic, ultimately hopeless, and without meaning that we treasure our religious community. It is our community of ultimate concern.*[43]

What is also remarkable then is that, paradoxically, having suffered the persecution by the Christians, Rubenstein has become more open to other religions than his own.

> We cherish our hallowed, ancient traditions, not because they are better than other people's or because they are somehow more pleasing in God's sight: we cherish them simply because they are ours and we could not with dignity or honor exchange them for any other. By the same token, having lost the need to prove that what we are or have is better than what others are or have, we have gained a reverence for the sacred traditions of others. This is a corollary of our belief that these traditions are not matters of original choice but are part of the absurd givenness of every concrete, limited human perspective.[44]

God who Shares Sufferings

In face of such apparent absence of God, some people believe He is present in the middle of their sufferings. Elie Wiesel remembers an occasion in Auschwitz when a young boy was hanged and all his fellow Jews were forced to watch the execution.

"Where is God? Where is He?" someone behind me asked.[...]

For more than half an hour he stayed there, struggling between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed.

Behind me, I heard the same man asking:

"Where is God now?"

And I heard a voice within me answer him:

"Where is He? Here He is—He is hanging here on this gallows...."[45]

When we remember that Wiesel is a Jew who would not believe in the salvation by the cross of Jesus Christ, his view is significant. It looks so near to Christian idea of God's suffering on the cross that it may help open up the dialogue between Judaism and Christianity today. Perhaps only difference between most Christian and Wiesel on this point is that Wiesel does not see salvific power in God's suffering. He says,

> Surely we have no right to complain, since God, too, knows suffering; nevertheless, we can say that the suffering of the one does not cancel out the other; rather, the two are added together. In this sense, divine suffering is not consolation but additional punishment. We are therefore entitled to ask of heaven, "Do we not have enough sorrow already? Why must You add Yours to it?"[46]

Conclusion—Mutual understanding and Respect between Christians and Jewish People

It is well known now that when the Shoah was on the way, the world did not do its best to prevent it. As Rabbi Solomon points out, the Church did not excommunicate Hitler after all, and her opposition to Nazism was not explicitly to its anti-Semitism.[47]

Yet, it is not only during the Shoah that the world seems to be cold to those Jews who suffered and survived. It is reported that even now, survivors sometimes suffer from the cold eyes of those whom they meet. A survivor is reported to have told:

> People who came to my cousins' house used to ask me such things as whether I had been able to survive because, perchance, I had slept with an SS man.[48]

Even without experiencing such, survivors are often feeling guilty just for having survived. Hass has reported what he calls "survivor guilt" as typically "the feelings of those who fortunately emerge from a disaster which mortally engulfs others."[49] A lot of survivors are still suffering today from the feeling that they did not do their best to save their families or beloved who were killed in the Shoah.

For some survivors, Hass writes, "joy after Auschwitz is sacrilegious":

> Joy would imply a betrayal of the memory of all those murdered. Happiness would distort all which had occurred.[...] "There's always in the back of your mind everything. How can you, how can you enjoy yourself? It's almost a crime against the people that you lost, that you can live and enjoy yourself."[50]

We do not have any right to condemn the innocent for innocently survived. Rather, it is our responsibility to understand their hardship as much as possible, and determine never to repeat anything like the Shoah. It is noticed that anti-Semitism is reviving again. It is our responsibility to stop that movement, on the recognition that we are all same human beings. Christians must respect Jewish people despite the difference of the religions. We see how Jews have been struggling to reconcile with their God after having suffered the Shoah, and how they are sincere in their faith. To neglect the humanity of any survivors or Jewish people just because they are survivors or Jewish is to be on the side of Hitler who tried to destroy their humanity, and to be a member of the Nazis.

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5 Primo Levi, "The Drowned and the Saved," *Holocaust: Religious and Philosophical Implications*, ed. John K. Roth and Michael Berenbaum (Paragon House, 1989), p. 112.
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7 Hass, p. 41.
8 Hass, p. 41.
9 Hass, p. 164.
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14 Levi, *If This is a Man*, p. 398.
15 From a hand-out from Dr. Domb at Cambridge University, England on October 22, 1998.
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35 Rubenstein, pp. 161–162.
36 Rubenstein, pp. 171.
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38 Solomon, p. 20. Quotation is from, Mare H. Ellis, *Toward a Jewish Liberation Theology* (Orbis Books, 1987).
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50 Hass, p. 77.